

Focusing on insurance

The pioneer of Japan's fishery co-operative movement recalls his efforts to insure the well-being of Japanese fishermen

The Sakazuki FCA was often referred to as the model for all the other Hokkaido FCAs. The Sakazuki example was also the reason that Dogyoren and Shingyoren took the initiative to promote such savings in the their 42 prefectural Credit Federations throughout the nation.

Fifty-seven years have now passed since I first came to Hokkaido. I can still recall the pitiful conditions of the fishing villages throughout the island, in which most of the fishermen and their families lived in abject poverty, while only a few of them could be said to be well off.

“Why?” I asked myself. “Why were these fishermen so poor, and what was the cause of their poverty?” I could see no reason for the situation to be that way. The situation was particularly shocking when one realized that Hokkaido was surrounded by seas that were classified as being among the top three fishing grounds in the world. I realized that something was seriously wrong, and that realization formed the basis for my life's work in the fishermen's liberation movement.

I have done many things to resolve the countless problems that the fishermen faced. One such endeavour that was particularly important was the establishment of a mutual insurance system for fishery damage. The original motivation for this system was the aforementioned question that I had asked myself.

Managing the fishing industry can be extremely difficult due to the changes in natural conditions and fluctuating harvests. One of the features of the fishing industry is that it must inevitably deal with the effects of natural phenomena.

I realized that if we collected money regularly from the fishermen and accumulated this capital in a Mutual Insurance Fund, it might be possible for us to cover any losses that the fishermen might incur as the result of extremely bad harvests. With such a system, we would help the fishermen overcome their financial difficulties.

I had originally conceived this idea in 1933, when I was an official of the Hokkaido government, but few paid much attention to the ideas of a minor official such as I was. A certain Mr Minetomo was the only person who showed any interest in my idea. He had been a career diplomat with the national government, and after he retired, he began to promote a mutual life insurance system for fishermen, under which groups of crews were eligible for insurance by large insurance companies.

I asked Minetomo to study the possibility of initiating such a system in the fishing communities throughout the nation. Minetomo shared my enthusiasm to help the fishermen, and he conducted his research for several years, without receiving any compensation.

He got few responses from either the prefectural governments or those in the fishing communities. Most of the people he talked to said that such an insurance system would, once established, serve only to take away the motivation of the fishermen. The fishermen would become lazy and, if the insurance covered any losses, they would not risk the dangers of working on the open sea.

Insurance system

Therefore, we had to wait until 1964 before we could establish such an insurance system to protect the fishing

households. This was accomplished by strengthening the functions of Shingyoren, establishing Shidoren, the Hokkaido Educational Federation in 1961, and by restructuring Dogyoren.

While the Japanese economy had made a rapid recovery from its defeat in World War II, certain sectors of the economy had not fully recovered. Led by the steel, shipbuilding and textile industries, the economy was starting to grow at an ever-increasing rate. The incomes of the men who worked in the primary industries, on the other hand, lagged far behind the incomes of those who worked in the secondary industries.

The Japanese government realized the seriousness of the situation and enacted the Industrial Structure Improvement Act in 1960 and the Coastal Fishery Development Act in 1963. Although these laws resulted in noticeable improvements, I felt there was still one more thing to be done in order to ensure the well-being of those in the fishing communities. In order to protect them from the effects of natural disasters, I still believed that it was necessary to establish a mutual insurance fund with which they could stabilize the year-to-year fluctuation in the management or their fisheries. With the changes in the structure brought about by the aforementioned laws, the time seemed right for us to act.

Since I had assumed the post of vice-president of Zengyoren in 1952, I had proceeded to express my idea not only to the leaders of the Hokkaido FCAs, but also to those of other prefectural federations of FCAs, throughout the nation.

We requested the national government's Fishery Agency to study the possibility of enacting a law. The agency, therefore, started to research the conditions of fishery management and the possibility of establishing a mutual insurance system for fishery damages, which was to be supported by the central government.

Many officials of the fishery agency were reluctant to present a draft of a bill to the Diet. They put forth various excuses, saying that the risks in the fishing industry were too great to allow such a mutual insurance system to work effectively, or

that they did not have enough data to make any decisions, or that it was simply not the proper time to pass such a law.

Nevertheless, I continued to promote strongly the movement to have all 3 mn fishermen throughout the nation unite under a common banner. Fortunately, I had the strong support of President Katayanagi of Zengyoren, and we succeeded in establishing a "National Headquarters to Promote the Realization of a Fisheries Compensation Fund for Damages Caused by Disasters." We also worked with each of the 42 prefectural federations of FCAs so that they could all establish their own similar organizations.

Hokkaido took the initiative in this movement by founding the "Hokkaido Prefectural Headquarters" and its secretariat within the Educational Federation. We were thus prepared to initiate a political movement in the fishery circles, but, in order to do this, it was necessary for us to lobby the members of the national Diet and have them understand our goals.

I was acquainted with Hanji Ozaki, an important figure in the national government. His father, Yukio Ozaki, had played an important role in the establishment of the parliamentary system in Japan, and his statue now stands near the Japanese Diet Building. Although he was not a member of the Diet, Hanji Ozaki was a well-respected advisor to the Yukio Ozaki Memorial Foundation, and was very influential among the lawmakers.

Political connections

Ozaki introduced me to Takeo Miki, the director of a committee in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) which was researching political issues. (Miki later became Prime Minister of Japan in 1974). Although I was definitely not a part of any political circles, I was aware of the fact that Miki had been the leader of the former Co-operative Party, which had been established immediately after the war. Miki's political philosophy was in many ways similar to that of the co-operative movement. When I had the opportunity to meet Miki, I explained to him the situation of coastal fisheries and the FCAs. I appealed to him regarding the necessity of

a government-supported system to provide insurance for the fishermen against damages caused by natural disasters.

I told him that, although the government had enacted the Coastal Fisheries Development Act in 1963, and the FCAs had established a Foundation for Future Development, we still faced serious situations whenever we were confronted by damages caused by these disasters.

I pointed out to him that an average of 700 fishermen died each year throughout Japan as a result of accidents brought about by the danger of their working conditions. I explained to him that many fishermen would go out into rough seas at the risk of their lives, simply because they had no alternative. If they didn't risk their lives, they would be risking the livelihoods of not only themselves, but also their families and the communities. Because of the large amount of damages suffered when the fishermen engaged in their high-risk work, it was imperative that something be done to deal with these fundamental problems.

Furthermore, I outlined to him the research we had done regarding a system of mutual insurance, and explained that we needed the support of the government if we were to provide full coverage for the fishermen. Miki understood my points

and expressed his sympathy for the plight of the fishermen. He then promised to support our movement and to work for the passage of a law to help realize a system of mutual insurance.

We, along with the fishermen, spent much time and effort lobbying various members of the Diet. Our efforts proved successful by the time of the general election in 1964, when not only the LDP but also other parties promised to support the bill that would establish this system for the fishermen.

Many prefectural FCAs held rallies and demonstrations in the major cities to appeal for public support. Zengyoren also voiced its support of the movement, and more than 3,000 fishermen from throughout the nation gathered in Tokyo to demonstrate. This was the first time in the history of Japan that such a large number of fishermen gathered in Tokyo for a demonstration.

Reluctant bureaucracy

After the election, the government began to work out a budget for the fishermen's insurance system. Some bureaucrats were, at first, reluctant to have this law passed, but, because of the pressure from the fishermen, they had to draw up a bill to send to the Diet. The process of formulating the bill involved much discussion and argument. The bureaucrats in the Finance Ministry

insisted that the law be named the “Law of Mutual Insurance for Fisheries,” but we wanted to call it the “Fishery Damage Compensation Law.” It is true that this law was based on the concept of mutual insurance, but I was worried that the funds which were collected from the fishermen might not be sufficient to cover any unexpected or large-scale damages. This would impose too heavy a burden on the fishermen, and it was, therefore, necessary for us to obtain government assistance.

With the strong support and powerful influence of Mr Ozaki and Mr Miki, we managed to have the bill made into law. On 26 June 1964, the bill was passed in both the Upper House and the Lower House and it was named the “Fisheries Damage Compensation Law.”

We had been very fortunate to have the strong support of the Socialist Party, too. They showed us in this case that they fully supported us in our demands for complete coverage by the government for fishery damages.

Thus, the bill was passed by the Diet, although a government-supported insurance system was not realized in this law. A solution, however, was agreed upon by the lawmakers and affixed to the law. It stated that the government would have to improve the system by adding a re-insurance scheme within three years from the enactment of this law. ❸

This ninth instalment is excerpted from the *Autobiography of Takatoshi Ando*, translated by Naoyuki Tao and James Colyn